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Partnership funding in flood risk management: new localism debate and policy in England

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Introduction

The localism debate has influenced new flood risk policy discussions in England and started to redefine the national flood and coastal risk management policy. A key focus of this new policy agenda is to encourage local authorities to undertake their responsibilities and replace the emphasis on the central organisation of flood risk management. In this line, flood risk management policy mirrors that of other governmental policies with a change to both the geographical and political scales of management. This, in turn, implies a change to the relationships between different actors involved in flood risk management decision-making (Pearce and Ayres 2012). The movement from a centralised responsibility towards the local and individual is manifested in the area of English flood risk management with some policy shifts having already been observed (Johnson and Priest 2008). However, the revisions of the responsibilities and role of the state and individual for managing flood risk have continued with a reinforcement of local scale management (Defra 2012). One critical area where this has been observed within the sphere of flood risk management is in relation to the funding of flood defence measures which provides the key focus of this study.

In general, the localism-debate has become more popular and relevant in policy discussions in recent years (Neal 2013; Clarke and Cochrane 2013) with scholars highlighting a 'revival of the local' (Brenner and Theodore 2002). Before identifying how localism has been manifested within flood risk management policy it is necessary to consider its renaissance in the broader context of public policy. Following the definition by Evans et al. (2013), localism is a summary of activities and changes to encourage local actors and stakeholders to take over tasks, responsibility and power from central Government, where the localities act independently within a national framework. There has been much debate and discussion

about localism, its characteristics, its causes and consequences (Brenner 2004; Coaffee and Johnston 2005; Featherstone et al. 2012; Kythreotis and Jonas 2012). Indeed, many drivers have been proposed to explain the dynamism of new localism and its increasingly widespread adoption into both policy and practice including: (1) the influence of the European Union, with regional and local policies and programmes, such as the Rural Development Program, Urban I and II as well as diverse directives (Water Framework Directive (EC 2000) or Floods Directive (EC 2007)), (2) national programmes, such as regional and local knowledge clusters or re-urbanisation programmes, (3) greater requests by local groups for greater political participation, accountability and legitimacy, and (4) recent financial and economic crises which have been placing an increasing strain on national funds and necessitating the exploration of alternative sources of financing public services (Cox 2013; Cohen 2012; Benson and Jordan 2010; Brenner 2004). These developments suggest that policy agendas should enhance the responsibilities of different actors and reduce and limit the controlling role of central governments. This move implies a new contract in the relationship between different actors, citizens and stakeholders (Adger et al. 2013).

One key characteristic of localism debates, as highlighted above, is focused on encouraging local public authorities to take a more active role within the shaping the policy (Allen and Cochrane 2010; Boyle 2009) thus shifting responsibilities and duties between national and local bodies. This, however, often occurs without a corresponding change of the legal framework, powers or the reallocation of additional resources between different scales (Coaffee and Johnston 2005). An observed consequence of this has been the creation of conflicts and misgivings between national and local scale authorities (Brenner and Theodore 2002). Scholars see within the localism process a change in the state structure resulting in a negative impact on democratic structures and social equity (Brenner 2004; Featherstone et

al. 2012). The main problem for the local authorities is the gap between policy guidelines and the implementation processes (Cowell and Owens 2006) often resulting in misunderstandings and conflicts between different actors, citizens and stakeholders in particular where different agendas and levels of understanding are evident (Mason and Muller 2007). Furthermore, there are many other limitations arising from the adoption of localism including (1) only a (re-) imagination process of sharing risk burdens, (2) a shadow of more democratic processes, (3) insufficient balance of power between the different stakeholder groups (Allen and Cochrane 2010), (4) potential ‘hollowing out’ of the government because of downscaling responsibilities to local actors, (5) the creation of a gap in the transfer of power, resources and capacities with the result that local authorities are not able to handle all their new tasks (McCarthy and Prudham 2004: 276), and finally (6) unsolved conflicts between different actors, citizens and stakeholders.

Table 1 summarises the main characteristic of localism that have been identified within the literature. These general characteristics are used to analyse how Localism has been implemented and operated within the sphere of flood risk and the table provides an initial assessment of the potential implications for flood risk management which will be examined below.

[insert Table 1 about here]

The aim of this paper is to present the actual impacts of scalar re-organisation to flood risk management policy in England; in particular focussing on the influences of the introduction of the revised system of funding flood management schemes in England “Partnership

Funding” (Defra 2010) and its consequences. Therefore, this paper deals with following two research questions:

1. What has driven the move towards ‘the local’ in flood risk management and what is the new role and relationship for the different actors, citizens and stakeholders?
2. What are the consequences and outcomes of the Localism approach in flood risk management, in particular to social and political functions?

The paper adopts a primarily qualitative approach and utilises a desk-based policy analysis supplemented by expert interviews. Interviews (n=15) were undertaken with a range of stakeholders (including representatives from public authorities, flood risk managers, academics and other actors with interests in flood risk management). These were transcribed post-interview and subsequently these data were analysed adopting a grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Thaler et al. 2013) utilising a systematic process of open and selective coding (Charmaz 2006).

Partnership Funding in flood risk management in England

The role of the different actors in flood risk management has changed over time, especially in relation to who should contribute to funding flood risk management, and has primarily involved a discussion between public actors (nationally and locally) and private actors (businesses and/or individuals). In general, the English funding system for flood risk management can be divided in five key time periods (Table 2).

[insert Table 2 about here]

Multiple drivers for change are evident and might explain the re-emphasis towards local funding sources and a re-emergence of the importance of locally-based flood risk management in England. Key factors include the outcomes of the Environment Agency study *Investing for the Future* published in 2009 (Environment Agency 2009) as well as the recommendations from the UK Government's Independent review into the 2007 floods (the Pitt Review) (Pitt 2008). The former study recognised the need for an approximately £20 million increase, exclusive of the annual rate of inflation, to the annual flood risk management budget for asset construction and maintenance (Environment Agency 2009). However, despite the EA study's recommendations the central Government actually reduced public national funding for flood risk management in the following years (Figure 1). This was in part as a result of the new Coalition Government's spending review in October 2010 (HM Treasury 2010) and recognition of the growing pressures on public spending and resource allocation. The spending review cut the capital funding (including construction, improvement and reinstatement of flood alleviation schemes) from £354 million (2010-11) to £259 million (constant over the next spending review period) as well as revenue funding (including maintained works, emergency response, hazard and risk mapping and modelling) from £275 million (2010-11) to £226 million (2014-15).

[insert Figure 1 about here]

One reason for this budget reduction is the fiscal squeeze and state budget deficit. However, in 2012 the UK Government also committed an additional £120 million over the following two years for the building of new flood defences, with a key objective of this investment

being to stimulate economic growth (House of Commons 2013a). The focus on economic growth potentially highlights a step backwards towards the 1980s political ideology (Haughton et al. 2013). Nevertheless, the latest House of Commons review (2013a) reported that national Government still provides approximately 93% of the flood defence budget. These numbers show a very small contribution by local and non-state actors, stakeholders and citizens. This suggests that Localism is seen more as a rhetoric discussion, especially if this assumes that the level of financial contribution also defines the level of participation in the final decision-making practices. A large contribution from national government is indicative of a strong top-down policy.

Implications of Partnership Funding for flood risk management in England

The following section discusses the consequences and outcomes of the new Partnership Funding regime for English flood risk management policy. The focus is on the demonstration of Localism and its influence on: the power and influence of the actors, the reorganisation of scales, changes to the nature of governance and the importance of networks in decision-making practices.

New governance arrangements and the relationship between the national and local level

One consequence of Partnership Funding is the change in governance structure mainly for planning, decision and implementation processes with the shift to a broader partnership-oriented governance arrangement (Allmendinger and Haughton 2012). All stakeholders interviewed stated that the introduction of Partnership Funding changed the governance structure (Interviewee_1; 9; 13; 15) and in particular, the new policy has increased the number of actors involved in decision-making practices including stakeholders such as public servants, politicians, businesses and private householders (Interviewee_15). In turn, the

broadening of stakeholders involved has also had a strong influence on the interactions between these different actors. Many of the different actors display a strong interdependence of interests (Interviewee_8; 12). This, in particular includes the question of funding; with the values of individual contributions demonstrating a high potential for conflict between different actors. Additionally, the EA has shifted some of the financial risk towards third actors. Consequently, local actors and citizens are required to increase their contribution if the project costs increase. Partnership Funding is effectively encouraging a shift in the management of flood risk away from being a public good towards being a private good (Meijerink and Dicke 2008). The consequences of this is that the implementation process is strongly based on local actors and their interests as well as those of the EA (Interviewee_9; 10) and that decisions about flood defence schemes are being based on actors relationships and interests and political will; rather than an objective decision process.

As well as the types of actors and the scale at which they have influence, relationships between actors are also altered by the implementation of Partnership Funding. The move towards increasing local funding contributions, through Partnership Funding has not surprisingly increased both the involvement of local actors but also their influence in decision-making practices (Interviewee_8). Consequently, a critical development has also been a manifestation of privatisation within the processes of flood risk management; which refers directly to the greater involvement from non-state actors in flood risk management discussions (McLennan and Handmer 2012). Firstly, grassroots organisations, such as local Flood Action Groups (FAG) have played a crucial role in organising the funding to implement local flood risk management proposals (through political pressure placed on governmental

organisations) and secondly, through private actors' and stakeholders' direct contributions to funding local flood alleviation schemes.

The importance of local network structures and arrangements

Local network arrangements are fundamental to the implementation of the new funding policy. Network structures and arrangements are particularly important for political collaborations and interaction across scales to ensure and realise individual interests and needs (Paasi 2004). Partnership Funding promotes broad local networks, in particular strengthening the position of non-state actors (civil society) in decision-making practices (Späth and Rohrbacher 2013). The non-state actors were observed to establish various local and horizontal networks with both private consultants and national actors such as Members of Parliament (Interviewee_8). Additionally, further networks were observed between actors at local, regional and national levels. The most important networks are those including the Local Authorities who are in general the key contributors for funding. Although there appears to be many networks established, the intensity and effectiveness of these networks depends strongly on the interests of the local actors and stakeholders. This in particular includes the mechanisms they use to encourage national level intervention in the realisation of defence schemes. Consequently, local networks including local citizens have a strong lobbying role towards gaining action by national and other local actors – an issue further discussed in relation to the role and power of grassroot organisations. Furthermore, the networks between different governmental levels are mainly constructed to alter power relationships. The main networks observed in this study were those established with technical experts from the public administration; the rationale being to provide strong technical support in the management process and (in a limited form) knowledge transfer.

Despite new networks being created and strengthened, leadership in flood risk management is still organised and dominated by technical experts, primarily the EA, the drawback being that the networks often lack formal conflict resolution mechanisms.

These networks play an important role in the participatory process in both flood risk management planning and decision-making. First, the networks give different local actors a common voice to satisfy their interests and needs. Second, the local networks provide local actors with the technical knowledge and expertise to interact more successfully with the public administration. Finally, the building of local networks partly replaces missing formal conflict resolution mechanisms. The interviewees explicitly mentioned that some scales were privileged. This can be interpreted as scale benefiting from scalar re-arrangements to ensure their hegemony status (Allmendinger and Haughton 2009), mainly by using specific strategies in the negotiation process with national and regional authorities.

Following Allmendinger and Haughton (2009) a further central discussion point not only concerns who gain and loses in scalar re-arrangement, but also the interaction between the scales. In this research, we analyzed the interaction between scales in terms of governance. Scalar re-arrangements involved the inclusion of various public stakeholders who had previously never been involved and a broader number of actors: thus leading to more resource intensive interactions and negotiation. Additionally, non-state actors and stakeholders acted as 'partners' or lobbying organisations on behalf of their 'community' and aimed to influence the decision-making process to ensure their interests. The scalar re-arrangement had a strong influence on both governance arrangement and settings, but also within the decision-making system, where different actors and stakeholders have employed new 'strategic and tactical manoeuvres' (Allmendinger and Haughton 2009: 631) to ensure

their interests. An interesting observation from the empirical results is the growing involvement of grassroots organisations in flood risk management.

The power of local grassroots organisations in Partnership Funding

Local grassroots organizations have a strongly influence in the flood risk management planning process, where the new scalar arrangement has moved from a 'classical' hierarchical planning approach towards 'soft space experiments' (Haughton et al. 2013). Partnership Funding provides new opportunities for local actors but also requires their effective mobilisation (Cox 1998; 2013). The new approach to funding is characterised by a high level of self-management and initiation by local actors including businesses owners and residents (Interviewee_10). Local grassroot organisations have been a powerful vehicle in facilitating the mobilisation of local actors. In particular, this research recognises the importance of Flood Action Groups, which are local self-help community groups organised by local private households at flood risk, as key actors. Those communities where these groups are well developed are more likely to have been successful under the Partnership Funding approach. Results from the interviews highlighted that the first role of local grassroots organisations was to create a voice through which to lobby for a local flood defence schemes. As a consequence, these grassroot organisations have taken over the lobbying role from local politicians (Interviewee_8; 10). The adequate background of the local actors and whether they are able to influence the social interactions and power structures at the regional and national level is an important issue. However, the increased involvement of local grassroot organizations has not only been positive. The rise of influence of grassroots organizations has led to a change in the relationships between different authorities (national and local) as well as between state and non-state actors and

stakeholders with the outcome of hollowing-out of the state (McCarthy and Prudham 2004). This raises critical questions regarding the process legitimacy if only those limited interests of the local organisations are embedded in the decision-making process (Allmendinger and Houghton 2009). Localism demonstrates a strong driver towards encouraging local actors and stakeholders to support 'their' community scheme. Interviewees discussed how local actors and stakeholders have used their social capacity (social and cultural capital) to adapt the flood alleviation scheme to their needs and interests, in order to drive socio-economic development as well as gaining the defence from flooding that they desired (Interviewee_15; 9). Locally tailored solutions to flood risk management is a goal of recent changes to flood risk management in England, although questions remain about the representativeness and fairness of this involvement and therefore the flood risk management outcomes. This research highlights that members of such organisations are very homogenous in nature and are made up of mainly white, well-educated, middle class professional people with a good knowledge of the flood risk problem and expertise and skills in the fields of planning and law (e.g. lawyers, or architects) (Interviewee_10). Key problems may be created where actors in local grassroots organisations interact with democratically elected bodies or public serving organizations without any democratic control. In addition to a high degree of local flood knowledge, these local grassroot organizations display high social, political and cultural capital and the 'right' habitus (Bourdieu 1986; Kuhlicke et al. 2012). Therefore, Partnership Funding may be leading to a shift away from a reliance on elected politicians' decisions – who should be aiming to balance the needs of all citizens - towards some non-state actors being involved in the decision making-processes: with the potential consequence of environmental 'racism' (Elliott and Pais 2006). Networks, as well as knowledge and habitus, have become key central commodities in the policy process. Without these local actors and

stakeholders are marginalised and there is a shift in state spatial process (Brenner 2004), away from a single-equal spatial strategy towards a multiple – individualised approach, where capability of local actors can secure their own interests and needs. In this regard, low-income and minority communities, which lack social and cultural capital and capacity, as well as economic power or national strategic interests, are typically excluded from, or not fully integrated into, the policy process. Partnership Funding also enforces uneven development between local authorities.

Conclusion

Partnership Funding has encouraged two fundamental developments in flood risk management practice. First, the empirical results highlight an increase in the number of actors in the ongoing policy discussion (equalling a new governance framework). Second, Partnership Funding empowers local actors increasing the influence and role of the local level within the decision-making process. In particular, some general lessons are:

- (1) communities with higher socio-economic status are more likely to guarantee their interests in the new scalar arrangements, because of their high social and cultural capital
- (2) local communities without this capacity have less of a voice in the decision-making process with the consequence of less attention given by the regional or national government
- (3) a central challenge is the connection and integration of localities in the policy discussion and decision-making practices

In the ideal scenario, the Partnership Funding approach includes a fully democratic and transparent system to ensure accountability and legitimacy. Different actors would act

efficiently by trying to ensure both social justice and equity. However, this research has identified the inequities present within society, where rural middle-class groups with local capacities, such as networks, skills and cultural capital particularly gaining from new funding scheme.

Furthermore, Partnership Funding has increased the interaction and use of resources (time and costs) between different scales and requires a move beyond participation or partnership approach. There are a number of key outcomes of the process including a common production and exchange of knowledge and new settings for self-rule norms and populist mediation. At the same time local organisations act and present themselves as 'bridging organisations' between state and civil society (Roy 2009).

Table 3 highlights some of the main findings observed from the empirical results and links Partnership Funding to the characteristics of Localism characteristics.

[insert Table 3 about here]

Localism is manifested in a number of ways through the recent changes to flood risk management funding. The new funding regime allows and requests local actors and stakeholders to participate in policy discussions, in relation to flood risk management planning, decisions and funding. Actors at the local level are able to use this opportunity and have built relationships with national actors to influence policy discourse at the local level (Cox 1998; Kythreotis and Jonas 2012) and increase their chances of securing their interests. According to Brenner (2004), Partnership Funding has increased the unevenness in England

as the national state has re-focused on specific localities. Local grassroots organizations are playing a crucial role in the overall discussion especially in the bargaining process with the Environment Agency and private householders are often substituting their political representatives. Partnership Funding is generally considered to be the result of “traditional neoliberal fiscal policies (e.g., budget reductions, spending cuts) sit alongside communitarianism and the mediating institutions of civil society” (Buser 2013: 17).

Partnership Funding encourages local actors to get involved in the ongoing decision making process. This includes a new space creation for local actors, which includes a shifting of power towards non-state actors and stakeholders (Allen and Cochrane 2010). This study shows that the ‘successful’ implementation of Partnership Funding refers to questions of local capacity and legitimacy of the actors and stakeholders involved (Furlong 2012; McCarthy and Prudham 2004) with the consequence that Partnership Funding foresees the promotion of wealthy-rural areas, where local actors have the knowledge, experience and capacity to wield it. Partnership Funding highlights some of the characteristics of Localism, but not only concerns it; it is also a response to the ongoing neoliberal policy in flood risk management (Peck 2013).

In summary, Partnership Funding has the potential to influence the power that local individuals can have upon flood risk management decision making: the change in scalar arrangements leading to a stronger role for, and focussed mobilisation of, local actors. However, the remaining question is if the new Localism debate in flood risk management is more than a decentralisation of responsibility.

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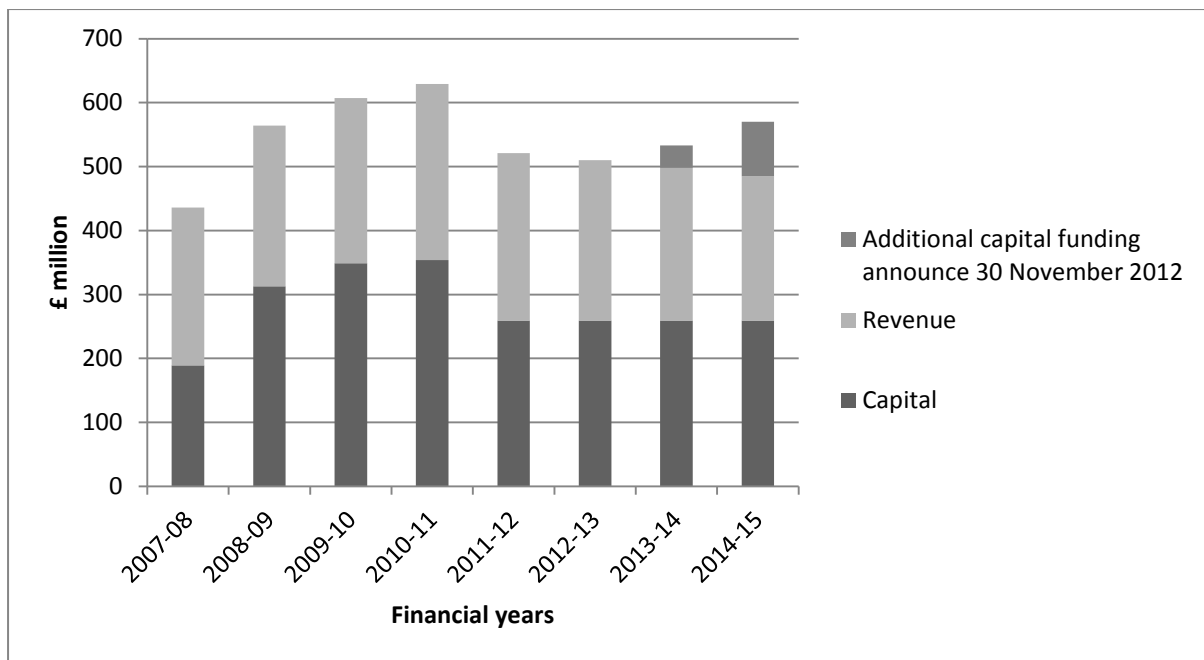


Figure 1: National Flood and Coastal Risk Management Grant-in-Aid Funding: 2007-08 to 2014-15

Source: House of Commons (2013b): 8

Table 1: Localism characteristic and implications for flood risk management funding

Localism characteristic	Implications for flood risk management funding
Legitimacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -interest party representation and participation in the decision-making practices -stakeholders acceptance of flood alleviation scheme
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -justification of flood alleviation scheme
Economic effectiveness and efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -effective decision-making processes for and flood risk management scheme
Social equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -distributional: fair distribution of risk-sharing between national and local contributor; fair distribution of transaction costs, such as management -procedural: fair decision making process
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -local actors and stakeholders largely contribute to the funding scheme
Drivers and leadership for incentives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -local actors and/or stakeholders drive the flood risk management decision-making practices - leadership in promoting, networking and leading flood alleviation scheme
Decision making-practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -strong influence of local decisions

Table 2: Key phases in English flood risk management funding schemes

Year	Policy paper, legislation	Short description
1930	Land Drainage Act	Regional and local focus
1998	Priority scoring	Focus on urban areas; prioritisation of flood and coastal erosion risk management
2004	Centralised spending	Shift in the funding decision from local towards national; prioritisation based on priority scoring
2008	Payment for outcomes	Change of the prioritisation system; holistic view of flood and coastal erosion risk management; including social justice aspects in the decision-making practices; dominant national funding
2011	Partnership funding	National and third party funding

Table 3: Localism characteristics positively demonstrated by Partnership Funding

Localism characteristic	Evidence in partnership funding
Legitimacy	-mainly represented by local grassroots organisations -influence the design and funding arrangement -wide acceptance of flood alleviation scheme
Accountability	-use of cost-benefit analyses -legal requirements for publishing of financial accounts
Economic effectiveness and efficiency	-higher costs, because of a longer decision-making practices -no evidence for cost-savings
Social equity	-distributional effects: no evidence of fair sharing of the risk-burden -procedural: fair decision making process
Funding	-local actors and stakeholders largely contribute to the funding scheme
Drivers and leadership for incentives	-key leader: local grassroots organisations are key drivers in flood risk management decision-making practices -areas without grassroots organisations: key leadership is concentrated within the EA
Decision making-practices	-strong influence of local actors regarding decisions concerning flood alleviation scheme, such as design or funding